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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was administered to 94 fifth grade students to measure their use of television and the relationship of this use to their development and maintenance of stereotypes about occupations and personality attributes. It was hypothesized that the more television children viewed, the more likely they would be to develop stereotyped attitudes. It was also believed that the relationship would be stronger for boys than for girls. The results indicated that high levels of television viewing were related to children's assumptions about personality characteristics of males and females. Children's application of sex-typed labels for personality attributes increased as their television usage increased. Boys not only were more stereotyped on both measures (occupation and personality attributes), but also viewed more television than girls. There was a small difference between boys and girls on occupational stereotype scores. Overall, occupational stereotypes were found to be stronger in children than stereotypes of personality attributes, but television was not seen to be the primary cause of occupational stereotypes. (RL)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S USE OF TELEVISION AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT OCCUPATIONS AND PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES

By

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INTRODUCTION

A wide range of influences contributes to children's development of attitudes and opinions about adult life. As children try to understand grown-up behavior, early social learning takes the form of attention to and modeling of sex-appropriate behavior (Maccoby, 1974). Certain characteristics are labeled "masculine" or "feminine" in the family, at school, and in their extended environment. Television, though only one factor in a child's life, has been shown to contribute to the development of sex role attitudes and perceptions (Miller & Reeves, 1976; Leifer & Lesser, 1976).

Although a major reason that people watch television is for entertainment, it also teaches viewers about society and the world. While children are being entertained, they are absorbing information about society (Comstock et al, 1978). In research on the viewing habits of 9, 13, and 17 year olds, six reasons for viewing emerged, learning being most important (Rubin, 1977). Because it is believed that television strongly influences children's attitudes and cognitions, the present study examines how children's reported use of television is related to their development and maintenance of sex role perceptions.

Most of the previous research on television and sex role stereotypes has been content analyses of programming. The results of these studies reveal considerable sexual stereotyping. Dominick (1979), in an analysis of women on prime time television from the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, found that more than 45 percent of network programs featured only male characters; total programming contained fewer than ten percent of females. Of the female roles, 80 percent were in comedy roles during the 1950's; this dropped to 60 percent during the 1970's. It is the male

roles that dominate the serious dramas. In research conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1979), almost 73 percent of the characters on television drama were males and only 27 percent were females. This was an update of earlier research (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977) to determine whether women's television roles had increased in numbers or changed in roles portrayed. The Commission concluded that progress had not been achieved and in some cases, stereotypes had intensified.

Still, percentages of women on television only reveal women's misrepresentation in numbers. Occupations in which women are portrayed expose the stereotype roles found in television. Included in the 1979 study by the Commission are the occupational roles which women and men portray on television. Approximately 20 percent of all males were portrayed in law enforcement roles. Less than three percent of the women held this role. Women were portrayed as secretaries, students, homemakers, and nurses, while men were casted as policemen, criminals, and doctors. Women were most fairly represented as professionals with about 15 percent compared to 18 percent for men. However, in exact numbers men largely outnumber women with 13 out of every 100 characters as male professionals and only four as female. Lemon (1978) had similar findings, showing that men are more likely than women to be portrayed as having high occupational status. Furthermore, the majority of women portrayed on television are younger and more attractive than men, supporting the claim that women are being stereotyped as sex "girls" (U.S. Commision on Civil Rights, 1977, 1979). In addition, women are usually defined as married or single, while many times it is unknown if a man is married (Davidson & Gordon, 1979), implying that marriage is more important to women than men.

With unfair representation of women in their roles and in numbers, it is very likely that children are learning stereotyped attitudes. Some research has been conducted relating television portrayals to children's sex role perceptions. Past research by Leifer and Lesser (1976) studied various influences on children's career awareness. They found that most information about careers is learned from the community and television, contributing to the development of occupational stereotypes. Miller and Reeves' findings (1976) also related television to the shaping of sex role perceptions. Their research on children's nomination of television models led them to conclude that television must be teaching or reinforcing stereotypes.

Sex role attitude toward careers is only one of several measures of a stereotyped outlook. Others might be children's perceptions of family members' roles or their sex role attitude toward personality traits. A personal attributes questionnaire was developed by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) to measure children's feminine and masculine personality traits. It tested if and how children apply sex role stereotypes to personal feelings. For example, do children generally believe that girls are weak and cry a lot, while boys are strong and tough? The PAQ related self esteem and conceptions of masculinity and femininity to self ratings on sex role attributes. Assessments, such as the PAQ, are the only tools that measure children's stereotyped attitude toward personality attributes. However, they did not attempt to measure television's influence on children's stereotypes.

Since there is little research relating children's use of television to stereotypes about personality attributes, this study attempts to measure the relationship. Previous studies show that children maintain gender

stereotypes toward personality traits and occupations. Also, content analyses identify television as portraying sexual stereotypes. Thus, this study measures children's attitudes toward occupations and personality attributes according to gender. Furthermore, this research attempts to relate both stereotype measures to children's reported use of television. Specifically, this study explores the following three hypotheses:

(1) The more children use television, the more likely they are to have stereotyped attitudes toward personality attributes.

(2) The more children use television, the more likely they are to have stereotyped attitudes toward occupational roles.

(3) The above relationship should be stronger for boys than for girls, to the extent that sex affects how much they use television.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The subjects were 94 fifth grade students (52 boys and 42 girls), from two elementary schools in Southfield, a suburb of Detroit. The sample came from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Five classrooms participated in the survey.

Measures

Weekly Television Viewing. Regularly scheduled television programs were listed on a questionnaire (see Appendix I). The children were asked to check those programs they had watched within the past week. If a special program (i.e. movies, television specials, sports, etc.) had been viewed, they were asked to write in the title.

Stereotypes. This section of the questionnaire consisted of twenty questions, measuring how children attribute certain feelings and occupations to males, females, or both sexes. A five-point scale was incorporated

from Garret, Ein, and Tremaine (1977), who explored age and sex differences in sex-related occupational stereotypes of children. Below each question there were five available options: "only women," "mostly women, a few men," "men and women," "mostly men, a few women," and "only men."

Part I: Personal Feelings, measured sex role attitudes toward the the following characteristics: decision making, crying, needing others, caring, helping others, winning, and more. These questions were based on the PAQ Trait Stereotype Measure (Spence, et al., 1975). Questions were phrased like:

Ex. Who thinks they are pretty good at whatever they try to do?

only women | mostly women a few men | women and men | mostly men a few women | only men

Part II: Occupations included ten occupations representing a variety of occupational roles in society with which children would be familiar. At the top of each page it read:

Ex. Who do you think could be a scientist?

The same scale used for personal feelings was below each occupation. All ten occupations were listed in the same format.

Procedure

The survey was administered in the classroom environment. All five classes received the same instructions. Viewing time was administered question by question. The stereotyped questions utilized two examples with the students completing the survey independently. When the second example was discussed, the meaning of "Who do you think could be a..." was defined. "Could" was explained as anyone who has the ability to be that occupation.

Variables

Three variables for analysis were initially generated for each subject: weekly television viewing, personality attribute stereotype, and occupational stereotype. The last two were used as dependent variables. Weekly viewing time represented the total hours of television viewed per week.

Questions for the stereotype measure were weighted by importance. It was determined prior to the survey that certain characteristics more strongly influenced children's sex role stereotypes. For personality trait stereotype, there were five characteristics designated as feminine stereotype and five as masculine. Of each group, two were considered neutral to slightly stereotyped attributes: helping others, playing with little kids, confidence, and independence. If the response was "only women" to a feminine trait, the score for the question was +1. However, if the response was "only men," the score was -1. The remaining three questions in each group were designated as strongly stereotyped attributes: crying, decision making, needing others, leadership, caring, and winning. The scoring method was the same except multiplied by two, weighting these accordingly. The final score is the total points for the ten questions, with a range of -16 to +16. For example, if one subject answers all questions with the most stereotyped answers, the child's score would be calculated by:

6 strongly stereotyped questions...x 2 points = 12
4 slightly stereotyped questions...x 1 point + 4
16 Total

A negative score indicates a counter-stereotyped attitude, while a positive score reflects a stereotyped attitude.

The scoring method for occupational stereotypes was the same as for personal feelings. Nurse, secretary, and model were three occupations

weighted heaviest for stereotyped female occupations, while police officer/detective, doctor, and factory worker were weighted the most for male roles. This was determined by selecting the positions most held by that sex in society (Garrett, Ein, and Tremaine, 1977). The range of points for this was from -2 to +2. Less stereotyped female roles included teacher and sales clerk with scientist and newscaster as slightly stereotyped male occupations. The scoring for these four questions was from -1 to +1. Again the scores had a possible range of -16 to +16. A high, positive score indicates a more stereotyped child.

One independent variable, viewing time, was derived from the weekly television viewing measure. This was done by forming three groups based on subjects' scores (low, medium, and high). These groups were used to compare and contrast the various viewing habits and stereotype responses.

RESULTS

The data from the two dependent measures, personality attribute stereotype and occupational stereotype, were analyzed with two-way analyses of variance to determine the independent and interactive effects of television exposure (low, medium, and high) and sex (male, female). Weekly television viewing was analyzed as a dependent variable subjected to one-way analysis of variance with sex as the independent variable.

As indicated in Table I, a significant relationship was found for personality attribute scores due to viewing time, $F(2,92)=3.51$, $p<.05$, and sex, $F(1,92)=12.18$, $p<.001$. There was no significant interaction between the two independent variables. Finally, the relationship between weekly television viewing and sex was significant, $F(1,92)=6.82$, $p<.025$. Occupational stereotypes were not significantly related to sex or viewing time.

TABLE I: F Ratios

	Sex	Viewing Time
Personality trait score	12.18 $p<.001$	3.51 $p<.05$
Occupation score	NS	NS
Weekly television viewing	6.82 $p<.025$	—

Table II shows the mean stereotype scores as functions of viewing time and sex. Note that scores for occupation do not vary significantly as a function of the independent variables. Personality attribute scores, however, were affected by both viewing time and sex. High viewers were significantly more stereotyped than either low or moderate viewings. The mean score for boys is higher in both categories, but it is most significant for personality attributes. Also included in Table II is mean weekly television viewing as a function of sex. Boys view television more than girls with means of 22.10 hours per week for boys and 17.73 for girls.

TABLE II: Mean Scores

Dependent Variable	Total Mean	Viewing Time			Sex	
		Low	Medium	High	Boy	Girl
Personality attribute score	3.27	2.68^a	2.96^a	4.25^b	4.05^a	2.30^b
Occupation score	5.42	5.54	5.16	5.52	5.71	5.06
Viewing time (hr/week)	21.14	11.85^a	20.71^b	29.57^c	22.1^a	17.73^b

a, b, c: significant mean differences

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that high viewing is related to children's assumptions about personality characteristics of males and females. Children's application of sex-typed labels for personality attributes increase as their television usage increases. Though women's roles have expanded from the housewife stereotype, television still portrays women as family bound and as dependent on men (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). Children appear to rely on this stereotype in developing or reinforcing their attitudes. A majority of the children felt that "mostly women, a few men" cry when they are hurt or sad. The general results of the personality attribute stereotype suggest that emotional and sensitive feelings are designated as feminine, while dominant and aggressive characteristics are designated as masculine.

The impact of this finding exposes new characteristics concerning televisions portrayal of the sexes. The primary focus in the past has been on occupational roles and increasing the number of female characters. Though both of these are important, little emphasis has been placed on the personality traits applied to the characters. This study uncovers television's significant influence on children's sex role perceptions of personality attributes. The results, showing that high television viewing children believe that more men have leadership abilities and confidence than women, give reason to examine and evaluate the characteristics depicted in television roles.

Boys were more stereotyped on both measures. They also view more television than girls. Though it is important for children to think that females are able to hold leadership positions, it is equally important for children to accept males ability to express emotions. Because the boys have developed more stereotyped perceptions of personality attributes, they express their sensitivity less than girls strive for dominant roles.

Children also view occupations with a stereotyped outlook. The consistency found in the occupational scores shows little fluctuation between comparative groups. There is a small difference between boys and girls scores, with boys being more stereotyped. Television appears to play a part in children's development of occupational stereotypes. However, there are many other influences.

Every personal experience a child encounters plays a part in the development process. Most times that a child is exposed to a secretary, the position is held by a woman. The same holds true for nurses, models, etc. Preconceived, occupational stereotypes are obvious; in hospitals, for example, many children, as well as adults, refer to the male nurses as "doctor" and female doctors as "nurse." If television does not develop sex appropriate ideas, it at least supports preconceptions that have developed from exposure to the real world.

From the results, it can be seen that, overall, occupational stereotypes are stronger in children than personality attributes stereotypes. Because both measures utilize the same format and scale, a comparison of the means exposes this finding. (Refer to Table II.) The lowest occupation mean (5.06) was higher than any personality attribute mean (4.25). The means for personality attributes varied substantially by group, whereas the occupation means did not. This consistency suggests that television is not the single cause of occupational stereotypes. Children record the occupations and gender they see in society. Then television strengthens them.

Another important influence on children's sex role perceptions is the education system. Though the school books and other educational sources have changed, there still exists sex role stereotypes in the system. An article in the Detroit Free Press (16 February 1981) pointed out certain

areas where improvement is necessary to present the sexes equally. Two years of research by the Michigan Project on Equal Education Rights (PEER), found that all 16 districts studied failed to completely comply with the federal law banning sex discrimination in the school programs, facilities, and materials. Specifically, materials still continued to misrepresent women and stereotype male and female roles. However, the study did find that schools are changing. Though the educational process was not a major part of this study, it plays a role in the socialization of children, along with television and children's other learning sources.

Many factors are involved in the socialization process. The child's home environment, the education system, and exposure to the outside world are the three major influences. Television, enforcing the overall societal values, plays an important part. It incorporates the basic beliefs of the three factors into one grand presentation. Though television may not directly cause sex role stereotypes, it significantly influences children's perceptions of the world.

Based on the findings of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that television use is strongly related to children's development or maintenance of stereotyped attitudes and opinions. Because television often reflects society's attitudes, change in gender portrayals on television occur at the same slow pace as it does in reality.

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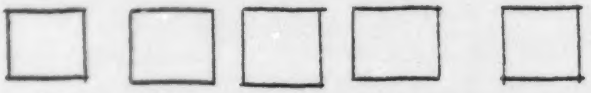
APPENDIX I

AGE_____
SEX_____

example 1. Which of these do you have at home?



2. Which of these do your parents do?

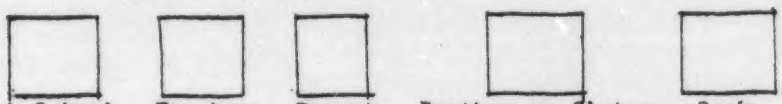
3. Which of these do you use to find out how other people live?

4. Which of these do you use to find out about things that happen in different places?

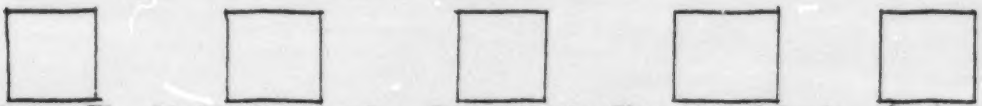
5. Which of these do you use to find out what it's like to be grown up?

6. Which of these do you talk about most with your friends?

7. When you need help with your homework, where do you go for help?



8. Which of these do you usually do after school?



9. If you do watch television after school, which of the following programs did you watch in the past week? (Check please)

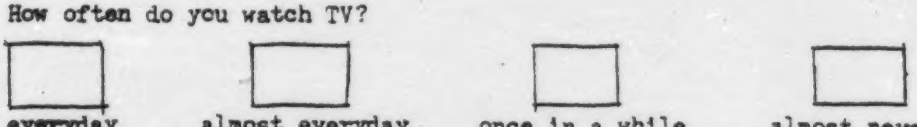
____Mary Tyler Moore
____Rockford Files
____Good Times
____The Brady Brunch
____Carol Burnette & Friends
____All in the Family
____Barney Miller
____Mash
____Happy Days
____Superman

10. Which of these do you usually do after dinner?

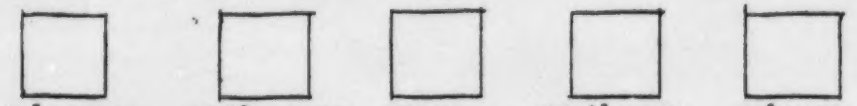
11. If you do watch television after dinner, which of the following programs did you watch in the past week? (Check please)

____Happy Days
____Little House on the Prairie
____Mash
____WKRP in Cincinatti
____Lou Grant
____Family Feud
____Laverne & Shirley
____Three's Company
____Taxi
____Hart to Hart
____One Day at a Time
____Trapper John
____Bullseye
____Doctor in the House
____Eight is Enough
____Charlie's Angels
____Vegas
____Tic Tac Dough
____Mork & Mindy
____Angie
____Odd Couple
____Benson
____Alice
____Dukes of Hazzard
____Dallas
____Ritter's Cove
____Muppet Show
____Tim Conway
____Love Boat
____Fantasy Island
____The Incredible Hulk
____Chips
____Archie Bunker's Place
____Jeffersons

12. How often do you watch TV?

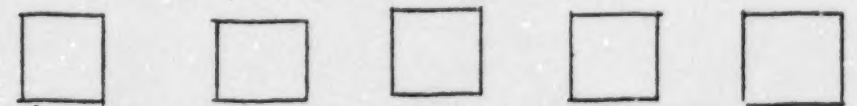


example 13. Who wears dresses? *

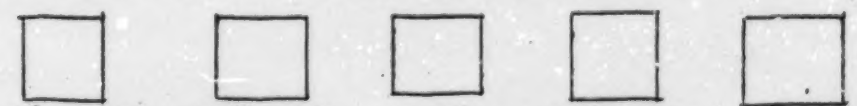


example 14. Who do you think could be a football coach?

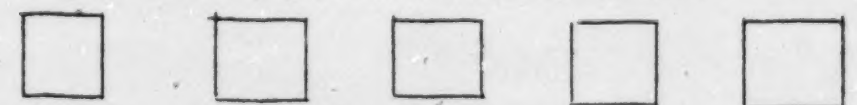
15. Who likes to play with little kids?



16. Who always tries to do things for themselves?



17. Who cries when they get hurt or when they are sad?

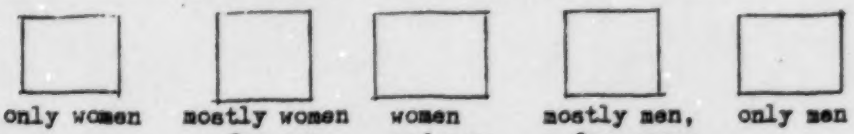


18. Who can make up their mind about things?

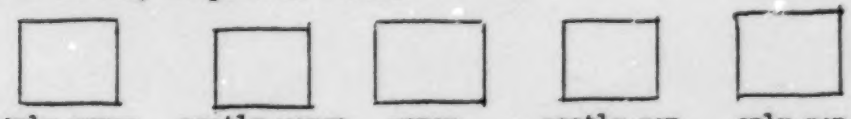
*Questions 13-24 are modifications of the PAQ by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp, (1975).

19. Who needs to have other people help them?

20. Who thinks they are pretty good at whatever they try to do?



21. Who is very helpful to others?



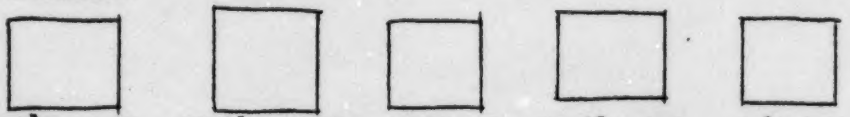
22. Who is always the leader?

23. Who cares about what other people are feeling?

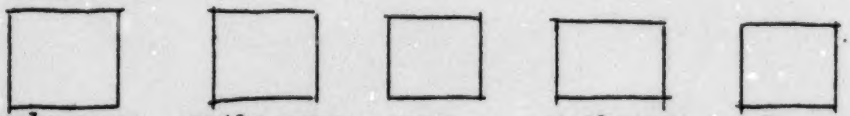
24. Who likes to win at games and contests?

WHO DO YOU THINK COULD BE A

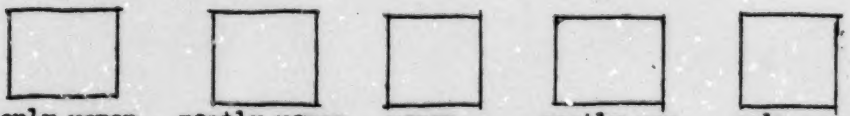
25. Scientist.



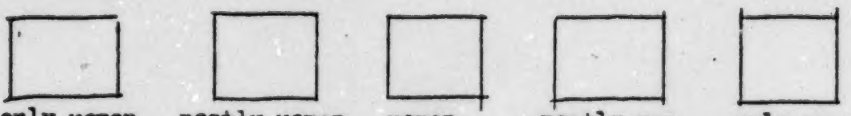
26. Nurse.



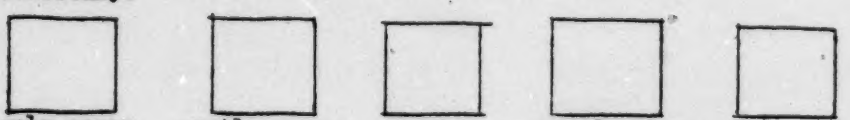
27. Sales clerk.



28. Police officer/detective.

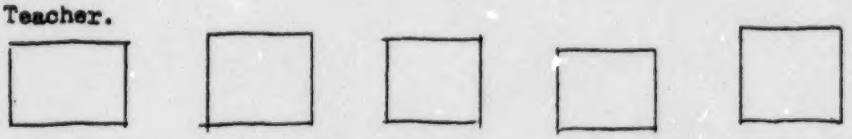


29. Secretary.

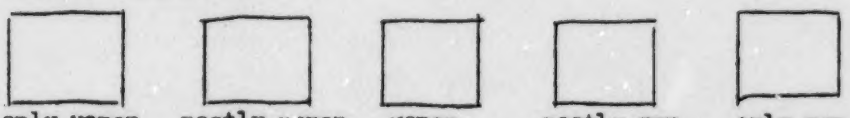


WHO DO YOU THINK COULD BE A

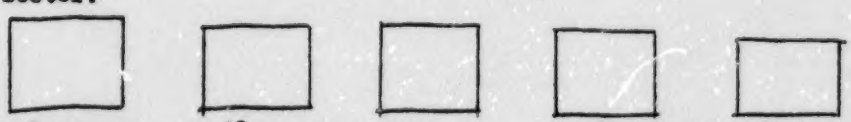
30. Teacher.



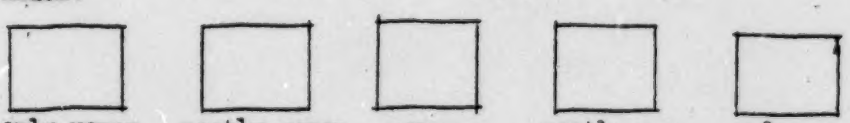
31. Factory worker.



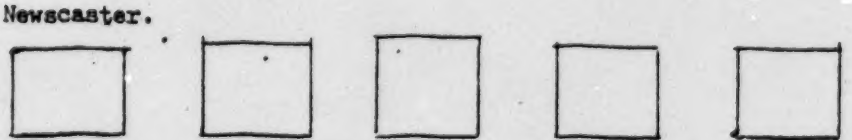
32. Doctor.



33. Model.



34. Newscaster.



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